

33 Rippon Ave.,
Hillsdale, Mich.,
Sept. 15, 1931.

Dear Dick;-- Received your two letters. Thanks. Time is still as short as ever, and I am even further behind on the things I want to do, such as my correspondence list. And I've really GOT to get to work on this new story--two of them, in fact. I am going to clean up this wild thing I have had laying around so long, and then tear into ~~the~~ third Skylark. This wild yarn isn't going to be so bad, either. I've got it pretty well rounded up into shape, and darned if I don't really like it! Of course, it isn't anything like anything else I ever tried--maybe that's why I like it. The new Skylark, though, is going to be a brutal thing to write. Have been working almost a year on the outline alone. Got it fairly well in hand, I think; but I wish it were done! As you know, a climax to Three--where I climaxed everything I could--will have to be something that will knock "em into an outside loop; and I'm not quite convinced yet that I can handle it without letting down. If I can't, I'll scrap it.

Thanks for the information on the Ship of Ishtar. I sent for one, got it, read and enjoyed it immensely. He told me he thought it was the best thing he ever wrote--and I agree with him. For sheer power, I have never seen its equal.

I am also very grateful for your discussion of the Spacehounds. You said exactly what I thought you would say. But there was, and is, a reason for most of that stuff. The Skylark was widely criticised, and with reason, as being pseudo-science, and not scientific fiction. Spacehounds was designed and written as strictly scientific fiction. The fact that it is really scientific called for some pretty heavy doses of physics; and at the same time compelled me to limit the scope of activity to our own solar system. That limitation in turn robbed me of an opportunity--or rather, let me say, made ~~XX~~ impossible such powerful and imaginative effects as abounded in the Skylarks.

You see, I was, and am, between the devil and the deep blue sea. It is impossible to be wildly imaginative and strictly and prosaically scientific at one and the same time--and yet that is what most of you fellows seem to expect of me! However, in the second and third Spacehounds (I think I have told you that this was the first of a projected series of three; the other two to be interstellar, and intergalactic, respectively, in scope. For these stories it will be necessary to transcend science a bit; but with a really scientific foundation laid in this first yarn, I think I can get away with all the power and emotion of the Skylarks, without offending the pure scientists too badly.

You yourself are making a horrible break when you compare me to Merritt in "gripping power" and "emotion". Merritt is a master, as you already know I think--but he is utterly a scientific; and you should know better than to call any of his work scientific fiction. It is fantastic fiction of a fine and wonderful kind--- but he does, and should, emphasize exactly the things he does. I could not write his style, any more than he could write mine--- we attain our ends by diametrically opposed means.

OVER

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I draw my characters one way; he by an altogether different method. Suspense and interest are carried in entirely different ways--in fact, there is no single point in common by which Merritt and I can simultaneously be criticised. I like his stories immensely, and he has told me that he likes mine; and it is quite probable that the same man could like both of us--but that lets us out.

So, youngster, you are more nearly right than you thought in your last page--you cannot stress both pure emotion (aside from love and character-drawing) and science in the same story without having something that smells to high heaven as a botched job!

In this connection, I wouldn't be surprised if you would like this thing I am writing now better than either the Skylarks or the Spacehounds, simply because it does go into human emotions, instead of science. It is quite possible that you are not really a lover of purely scientific fiction; but like fantastic fiction, thinly veneered with science, much better than you admit. For that is what the Skylarks actually were; and Merritt's stories, (particularly the Ship) contain not an iota of actual science.

Well, I was due on another job long ago, so I'll have to chop this off. Think I've answered most of the points; and I certainly do thank you again for the real appreciation you have shown of my stories. Tooodle-ooo.

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